

Speech by President Donald Tusk at the special session of the Parliament of Malta

It is a pleasure to be here in this newly built parliament, a fresh and solid expression of a proud democracy. In fact, it is the first national parliament that I have addressed as President of the European Council. Thank you again for the invitation.

Malta has always been at the crossroads of European history. This was true in the Great Siege of 1565 and also during the pivotal defence of this nation in World War II. Today, it is again true - although in quite a different way - in this new age of great migrations. And that is why Valletta is a particularly fitting place for African and European leaders to meet this week to begin really managing the disruptive and dynamic migration phenomenon through a rekindled partnership.

I want to first of all thank Prime Minister Muscat. Following the tragic mass drownings at sea last April, he immediately offered to host what I hope will be an historic conference of African and European leaders this week. The Maltese authorities have been tireless, professional and highly effective in working with us on the preparations. Thank you for your hospitality and selflessness. We are in your debt.

I also want to thank Malta for its assistance in tackling the refugee crisis whether it is supporting the work of the European Asylum Support Office here in Valletta, contributing to the hotspots in Greece and Italy or participating in the rescue missions across the Mediterranean. As a direct result of our collective actions, thousands of people were saved at sea this year who would otherwise have been lost. EU governments are reviewing over a million asylum applications between them, an all-time record number that would test any developed democracy. European leaders have helped to end donor fatigue to the World Food Programme and UN agencies to ensure that the basic needs of refugees in and around Syria are met.

Nevertheless, there is still much more to do and we are under incredible pressure of events. Implementation of the actions the European Union has agreed at five summits this year devoted to tackling migration issues needs to be speeded up. This is why European leaders will also meet separately on Thursday to review where we are with our internal European efforts and in our contacts with Turkey.

The single most significant global development in the last century is that humanity has increased four times over, including in Africa. According to UN projections, the African population is set to double over the next 35 years, and then keep growing at this rate. With the enlargement of the Schengen area in 2007, Europe has only recently regained a freedom to travel internally that has not existed since the outbreak of the First World War. We have seen recently how this newly regained freedom remains fragile in many respects. These realities - alongside the deteriorating security situation in many Middle Eastern and African countries - are testing Europe's internal solidarity today. Facing them will challenge and change the European Union as fundamentally as any treaty amendment, national election, or monetary crisis.

With our African partners, we have a shared challenge which is much more profound than a refugee crisis. It is long-term, structural, deeply rooted in the economic situation of Africa where even economic growth does not entail immediate job creation but rather triggers social inequalities and increased urbanisation. This is intimately connected to the growing instability that can be observed in the Sahel, or in the Horn of Africa. Such complexity calls for a genuine solidarity between the two sides and a recognition that security and sustainable prosperity are the birth-right of Africans and Europeans, alike and equally.

This week, Africa and Europe are not inventing a new political framework for migration and development. We have it already, most recently reaffirmed at our last EU-Africa Summit in Brussels. Rather, we are setting out a very concrete roadmap to put some meat on the principles both sides agree on. Whether it be on visa facilitation, making the most of remittances for development or fighting smugglers together, this summit is about action, concrete and operational action. Fresh political energy will be injected by over 60 African and European leaders in attendance.

While acting together in this field, Europe must be inspired by respect for Africa's sovereignty, as well as a great empathy and common concern for the continent's pressing concerns. Economy, stability and security as well as governance and the rule of law are the three key challenges. There are many ways in which we are going to be more active and smarter in how we tackle them in

partnership. One is a new Emergency Fund for Africa with seed funding of €1.8 billion. On top of our existing development aid to Africa, this new fund will help us - working together - to offer the peoples of Africa a better future at a time when young Africans today often only have a choice between unemployment or radicalisation. This is also why Europe will double the places available to African students and researchers via our Erasmus+ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie programmes.

Our African partners can help at a time of intense migratory pressure by working with us to put in place by the end of 2016 at the latest an administrative infrastructure that can be a model for others on how to manage migration better. This includes making much more progress on poverty reduction and conflict prevention. It also includes the issue of taking back in an efficient manner those who do not yet qualify for a visa, or those who do not require international protection. African officers based in our countries could help us to identify and document their nationals in Europe who may have destroyed their passports to avoid returning home when asked. But the European involvement will not end there: we will help African governments to re-integrate their own nationals and offer them meaningful socio-economic opportunities, including by funding training and educational programmes and creating new revenue streams for struggling communities. We will provide administrative help and more resources to assist African countries to deal with the huge migrations happening within Africa itself.

For over a decade, Malta has warned of the need for a more coherent European approach on migration. In 2005, the appearance of just a few hundred boat people was considered a very serious phenomenon. This year, according to the latest statistics, 1.2 million people have entered the Union irregularly, mainly by sea. But, through breakthrough initiatives like this week's summit, we hope to be in a much better place one year from now. Leaders will hopefully be able to work out a range of priority actions this week for how we get there, and get there quickly. We want to create a more stable environment for legal migration.

But as I have underlined for many weeks in all my public appearances, and will continue to do so, like Scipio about Carthage: The precondition for conducting our own European migration policy is restoring effective control over our external borders.

Migration will continue to be a politically destructive issue until true partnership is found between ourselves and others outside Europe, where each country, including our African partners, takes responsibility for its own borders and citizens.

Equally, European countries have to take co-responsibility for the needs and aspirations of sending and transit countries so that we have real operational partnership on the ground, not just in the language of carefully crafted diplomatic texts. This is our mission here in Valletta. We have not come to make strangers of each other, but to become much closer and better neighbours.

I want to thank Malta, its prime minister and its people, for everything you have done so far to help. Thank you.

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